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ABSTRACT

One of the difficulties counselor supervisors face is the lack of specific training in learning to deal with difficult supervisees. To address practical as well as theoretical concerns, two related sets of videotapes were prepared. The first set was designed to provide a stimulus for discussions of common supervisory problems. A role player presented a difficult supervisee role to each of three doctoral level supervisors, who illustrated one of three supervisory methods: skill development (teaching), personal growth (counseling), or integration (collaboration). Three short videotapes were made to illustrate each supervisory model. The second set of tapes recorded participating students' discussion of the videotaped role plays and their responses to the exercise. Although the learning of those who participated in the filming may be the most dramatic, supervisory trainees who observe the videotapes and discuss their own reactions should also be better able to handle such situations in actual practice. (JAC)

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Training of Supervisors Through Videotaped Vignettes

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Supervising the Supervisor

Were we to survey a large group of experienced counseling supervisors about their most difficult supervisory sessions, we would likely find a number of common themes underlying these difficult sessions. There are supervisees, for instance, (a) who maintain a totally helpless posture throughout their meetings, (b) who perceive the supervisor only as a source of criticism and who reject all positive feedback, (c) who make excessive and unrealistic demands upon the supervisor, or (d) who are so defensive as to argue with even the most minimal feedback. Certainly this list is incomplete, but most supervisors will recognize that these problem supervisees do exist in everyday experience. How do supervisors learn to deal with these difficult supervisees? Most often, beginning supervisors respond in a "seat-of-the-pants" fashion: doing whatever seems most appropriate at the time.

As supervising supervisors, we anticipate that our supervisor-trainees will experience these issues. We also believe that we can, and should, directly involve these trainees in a discussion of the variety of options open to a supervisor in responding to such issues. These discussions can focus on practical as well as theoretical concerns and, in the process, can lead to more appropriate options than the haphazard "seat-of-the-pants" approach. In an attempt to accomplish this objective, we have prepared two related sets of videotapes.

The Stimulus Tapes

The first set of videotapes were designed to provide a stimulus for discussions of common supervisory problems. A role

player, generally a doctoral student in Counseling, presented one of the "difficult supervisee " roles to each of three doctoral-level supervisors. Although the supervisee was asked to present nearly the same problem (e.g., unreasonable demands) to each supervisor, each of the supervisors illustrated one of three relatively distinct supervisory models: skill development (teaching), personal growth (counseling), or integration (collaboration).

Although Hart (1982) more completely describes the three supervisory models, the definitions below give an overview of the contents of each approach.

1. Skill Development -- The supervisor takes the role of a teacher to aid the supervisee in developing a sound conceptual understanding of clients and in demonstrating the basic skills of counseling. Because it is clear that the weight of experience and expertise is with the supervisor , there is an established hierarchical distance between supervisor and counselor. The initial focus of supervision is on the client, followed by a focus on techniques and skill development. For example, a discussion of discrepancies in the client's behavior may lead to an explanation of the skill of confrontation which, in turn, may initiate a role play with supervisor feedback on the counselor's development of that skill.
2. Personal Growth -- The supervisor accepts the role of counselor to aid supervisees in gaining insight on how their feelings and emotions influence their work with clients. A counselor's feelings often reflect internal

reactions which may be part of that counselor's earlier experiences and may be unrelated to the client who is presently being interviewed. For example, a recent loss may make it very difficult for a counselor to discuss death with a client. Focus on exploration of the counselor's loss may promote personal growth allowing more effective counseling in the future.

3. Integration -- In this model, the supervisor views the counselor as a peer or colleague. The assumption is made that the counselor has the necessary counseling skills and the appropriate levels of self-awareness and personal growth. Unlike either the Skill Development or Personal Growth models, the Integration Model reduces the hierarchical distance between counselor and supervisor to a minimum. A collaborative relationship allows discussion of a wide variety of issues, particularly those related to the interactive dyad of counselor and client. Often the parallels between the supervisory relationship and the counselor-client relationship are discussion issues for an Integration Model supervision session. An example of the Integration Model might involve a counselor who is "stuck" on what to do with a given client. As the discussion of this "stuck" feeling proceeds during supervision, both counselor and supervisor offer hypotheses to explain the counseling impasse, and they generate possible methods to alter the situation.

Thus, for each supervision problem, three short (5-6 minute) videotapes were made to illustrate each of the supervisory models.

The filming of these videotapes involved three different problems (i.e., 9 total segments). Although the initial set of stimulus tapes had been the sole objective of this project, the student role-players suggested a further set of videotapes that we now recognize as contributing significantly to the possible value of this project. The students asked to tape their discussion of the role-plays as well as their responses to the exercise itself.

The Panel Discussion Tapes

The doctoral student role players in the stimulus taping had numerous reactions to the videotaping experience, and they wished to discuss these with one another on film. Thus, the three role-played supervisees and their three role-played supervisors met, as a group, to discuss the earlier filmed segments. An off-screen interviewer asked the participants the following questions:

1. What were you thinking during your session?
2. What were you feeling during the session?
3. How helpful did you feel this supervisory model was?
4. What kinds of problems were you encountering?
5. In "real life", what supervisory model would you prefer as a supervisee? As a supervisor?

The videotape of this discussion was lively and fun to film, but it also clearly illustrated the wide range of concerns and the variety of learning that the initial videotaping had generated.

Uses of the Videotapes

The stimulus tapes were shown to a class of supervisor-trainees. Each tape was viewed while students took notes identifying

the supervisory model displayed and indicating the approach they might have used with the supervisee illustrated. Thus, after each segment, the discussion related to the following questions:

1. What supervisory model was demonstrated?
2. Was this an accurate depiction of this model? Why? Why not?
3. How would you characterize the supervisee's problem?
4. How helpful do you think this model is (or might be) for the type of problem illustrated?
5. Where is this session headed? What will probably happen later?
6. What approaches might you use with this same supervisee?

Students who had specific suggestions for alternative approaches were asked to role-play their ideas with another class member acting as the supervisee. Following these role plays, a similar set of questions was again asked to stimulate additional discussion.

Not unexpectedly, these supervision trainees were very curious about what the "actors" were trying to demonstrate and what they were feeling during the taping. Therefore, the panel discussion videotape was played. Further processing by the class followed the second videotape.

Summary

What started as a two-hour videotaping session to develop stimulus tapes has resulted in a transportable process highly useful in supervising supervisors. The wealth of learning

accomplished by the role players in making the tapes is illustrated directly in the panel discussion filmed afterwards. Although the learning of those who participated in the filming may well be most dramatic, those students who observed the completed videotapes and discussed their own, likely, reactions to similar supervisory problems will be better prepared to handle such situations when they occur in actual practice.

Given that nearly every counselor training program and a good number of agencies and counseling centers have ready access to videotaping, our relatively simple method of supervising supervisors can be implemented in a variety of settings. Although we can (and, indeed, may) use these tapes again and again as stimuli for discussion, we will continue to make new tapes because of their immediate learning value to those who are involved in the filming! We highly recommend the use of the video technology as a teaching devise for supervising supervisors in this manner.

Reference

Hart, G. M. (1982). The process of clinical supervision. Baltimore, Maryland: University Park Press.